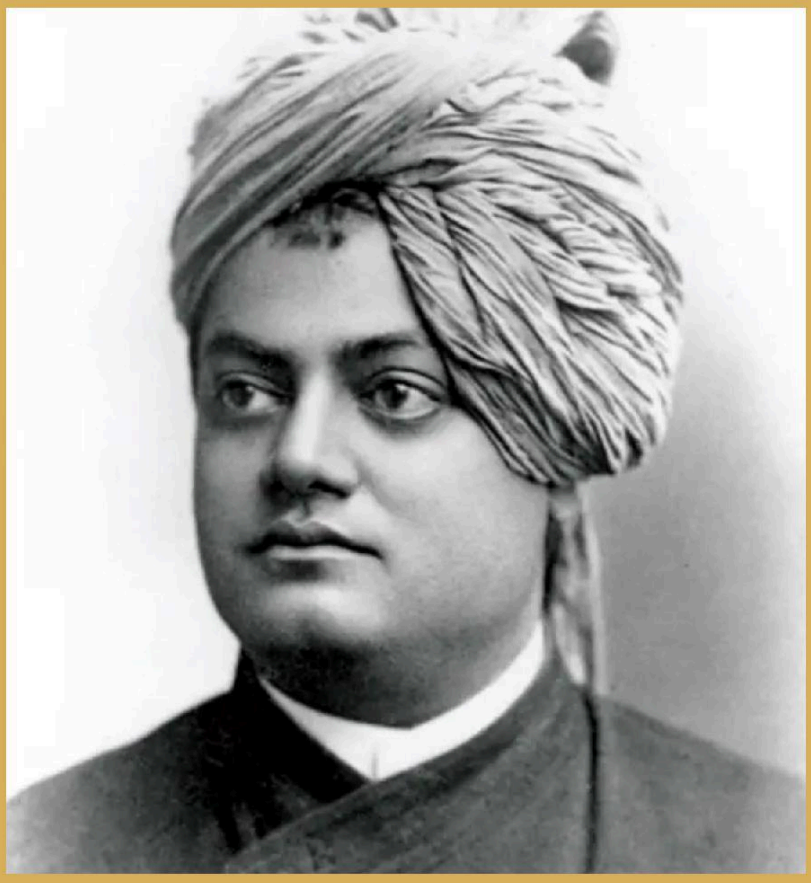
Monk and Patriot: Swami Vivekananda



Prof.V.A.Sarma
(Translated by Prof. K.V.Chalapati Rao)

Om Sri Venkateswaraya Namah ✦ Om Sri Ramakrishnaya Namah ✦ Om Sri Ma

Monk and Patriot: Swami Vivekananda

A Poetic Work in Sanskrit

By

Kavirajahamsa, Darsana kalanidhi

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(Translated into English prose by Prof. K.V.Chalapati Rao).

Foreword

A few years after my retirement from Osmania University, where I served as Professor in the Department of Computer Science and Engineering, I developed an interest in learning Sanskrit. I made use of self-study books from Osmania University and Samskruta Bharati as also online lessons. While browsing through the books in the bookstall of Ramakrishna Math, Hyderabad, I once came across a book titled "श्रीविवेकानन्दः" written in Sanskrit verse by Professor V.A.Sarma, Retired Professor of Sanskrit from Sri Venkateswara University. Being a devotee of the Ramakrishna Order and having been initiated by Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj, I have been an admirer of the life, personality and the works of Swami Vivekananda. As such, I got interested in the contents of the book and translated it into English. I dictated the translation to my son Shashank who is in the USA, and he entered the same into the computer. Subsequently, he edited the document so as to be in a proper format for publishing. The book is very informative and the devotion of the author is visibly reflected in the narration in Sanskrit verse.

We earnestly hope that the present English translation will be of interest on a wide scale.

- Translator

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Chapter 1

Advent of the bud of Narendra in the lotus pool of Dutta family

दत्तवंशपद्माकरे नरेन्द्रमुकुलोद्गमः

The flower of Narendra blossomed on the plant of Dutta Vamsa. Mahatma Narendra, later known as Swami Vivekananda, was born with Shivamsa, for the establishment of Dharma.

In the Saptarshi Mandala was a brilliant Maharshi. A light donning the body of a child approached the sage and appealed to him to incarnate along with him for the uplifting of humanity. The compassionate Maharshi was subsequently born on the earth. The child was none other than Jagadguru Ramakrishna and the Maharshi became Narendra, later the monk, Swami Vivekananda. His grandfather, Durgacharan of Dutta dynasty became a wandering monk in his youth itself out of intense renunciation. In Varanasi, his wife along with her son, while crossing Ganga in a boat, found that his son fell into the river. To save her son Viswanath, she jumped into the river, not caring for her own life. They were saved by the boatman.

In Varanasi, while going around the city, she slipped and was falling down, when her hand was caught by a sage and prevented from falling. She recognized him as her husband and he too was surprised on seeing her. Muttering to himself that it was a play of Maya, he quickly moved away. The boy was Viswanath who later married Bhuvaneswari Devi.

The couple, Viswanath and Bhuvaneswari Devi were fond of each other. The husband was proficient in Persian and several other languages. He was adept in law and became a renowned lawyer. He was a jovial person and was ever engaged in serving the poor. His wife, Bhuvaneswari Devi was very much devoted to God, and spent her time reading Ramayana and other holy books. She worshipped Lord Shiva of Varanasi with intense devotion, and thereby obtained as His boon the son Narendra of brilliant disposition.

Narendra was born on 12th January 1863, the Makara Sankranti day of that year. The son of Bhuvaneswari Devi was destined to be a destroyer of ignorance and was like the Sun for the distressed sufferers from the intense cold of poverty. As an indication that the son was born due to the intense devotion of Bhuvaneswari Devi, she had many divine visions soon after his birth. Having got an aspect of Shiva as her son, she spent several days in deep meditation. The son was named Veereswara, but he was more popularly known as Narendra, the name he was given as per his horoscope. Narendra's advent was for the welfare of humanity.

Narendra was by nature courageous, daring, intelligent, and upright in behavior, and he was devoted to God and was of independent disposition. The boy inherited his father's discriminative faculty and wisdom, as also his mother's truthfulness, kindness, forbearance,

and courtesy to others. His father taught him the human side of morality, reasoning that morality is more important than caste and creed. Just as a flower spreads its fragrance while blossoming itself, Narendra's intellect and power manifested from childhood itself. His major subjects of study – Sanskrit, English and History, which troubled others – were mastered by him in a short time. Being highly intelligent, Narendra learnt mathematics and commerce without any difficulty. Devoting very little time to studies, he spent his time joyfully playing with his friends. The boy displayed his skill in physical exercises in gym, wrestling, cooking and music, in all of which he excelled. He was well-built, handsome, enthusiastic, and ever alert. With his argument and logic, he once silenced his Christian teacher when the latter said that worshipping idols leads a person to hell.

Once Narendra went into a ship along with his friend, despite the bar from the security guard, by obtaining special permission from the captain of the ship. While returning, when questioned by the security guard how he had entered, Narendra replied "Know that it is my magic". Once he arranged for the treatment of a boy who had a fever. On another day, he rescued a mother and child from an accident. Another time, Narendra was going with his friends in a boat. For some reason, one boy became sick and soiled the boat by vomiting. A sailor became angry, and repeatedly scolded him. Narendra called a policeman, who gave a warning to the sailor and restrained him. When Narendra was only 14 years old, he was watching a drama. In the middle of the drama, police came to arrest an actor. Narendra stopped the policeman from arresting the actor till the end of the drama. The audience were happy that they could see the full drama. Listening to deeds of this kind performed by his intelligent son, the parents felt very happy about the boy's courage. Proficient in studies and daring in his actions, he won several prizes and appreciation from others.

Chapter 2

Education

विद्योन्मेषः

On attaining the age of 16 years, Narendra joined college in pursuit of higher education. Being of sharp intellect, he learnt the substance of all the books of different subjects in depth. He did exceedingly well in examinations and exhibited his talent in debates too. The teachers were full of praise for his intelligence. His Principal and teacher, Hastie predicted – "In future, you will become a great orator". On listening to the speech given by Narendra on the occasion of the retirement function of a teacher, the President of the function, Surendra Nath Banerjee, himself a great orator, felt very happy and praised Narendra. Narendra's critical faculty blossomed and was brought forth in several debating competitions, in which he used to invariably win. However, secular education did not fully satisfy him and his thirst for spiritual knowledge increased day by day.

Even from his childhood, Narendra was ever engaged in helping others. As a student, he used to help needy boys by giving money to them. As a result of his inherited tendencies from previous births (Samskaras), Narendra had an indescribable yearning, rarely seen in others, in spiritual matters. Long ago, for Gautama Buddha, the son of Suddhodana, in his youth, two paths opened out in front of him – one having a leisurely householder life with children, wife, relatives and friends, and the other that of a Sanyasi with full renunciation striving for the liberation of humanity. In a similar manner, two paths were open to Narendra. Narendra too felt like Gautama Buddha the renunciative life of a monk to be superior. So, though he was pursuing his studies along with his class fellows with full concentration, he used to spend his time singing devotional songs, at times even neglecting his studies. He learnt vocal and instrumental music from well-known expert musicians like Veni Gupta. He enthralled the listeners with his singing in public functions, among friends and in college functions.

As Narendra advanced in his age, his yearning for God-oriented understanding increased as a natural outcome of his inherent wisdom. Once he met Maharshi Devendranath Tagore (father of Viswakavi Ravindranath Tagore) and requested him to teach him how to meditate. Maharshi Devendranath Tagore said to Narendra "My boy, your lotus-like eyes are undoubtedly shining like that of a Yogi".

Once, Narendra went to the house of a devotee, Surendranath Mitra, on the latter's invitation, to sing devotional songs on the occasion of a Sadhu visiting his house. Narendra's song, which was full of melody and intense devotion, enthralled everybody present there. Sri Ramakrishna, who was present there, felt extremely happy on listening to the song and enquired about Narendra with great enthusiasm. He invited Narendra to visit him in

Dakshineswar. With great yearning in his mind, Narendra too was looking forward to going to Dakshineswar to ask Sri Ramakrishna about the nature of God. He went to the Master with eagerness and this meeting would in coming years completely transform his life. Like cuckoo with the blissful spring season, lotus with the Sun, peacock with the black cloud, a Sun-scorched being with cool breeze, miser with acquisition of a treasure and a person who lost his way with guidance on the path to follow, in the same way Narendra was fulfilled on seeing the Supreme teacher in the sacred Dakshineswar, which was shining with the temples. Narendra was a youth well-versed in Astronomy, Physics, History, Mathematics and Logic. The teacher Ramakrishna Paramahamsa (Gadadhar) was in his behavior, a conventional follower of Hinduism with its eternal spiritual values and he drank the ocean of Adhyatma Jnana (Divine Knowledge).

Their meeting was an unprecedented union of the ancient eternal values with the modern spirit, and this event proved to be a supreme moment in the history of the world. It reconciled the paths of the east and the west, leading to the welfare of the society and was destined to remain forever a momentous historical event. It resulted in carving out an exalted path for this life and afterlife, a model for seekers after liberation and guidance for householders on how to lead their lives. For our country, Bharat, which at that time was the target of the invasion of a foreign culture, it set the trend for a new age of spiritual uplifting and awakening.

Chapter 3

The Divine World of Sri Ramakrishna

श्रीरामकृष्णपरमहंसालोकः

Let us now take an excursion into the life of Sri Ramakrishna, who was an ardent devotee in the 19th Century C.E. and regarded by many as an incarnation of God. That will provide us with an appropriate background for a comprehension of subsequent developments in the life of Narendra.

In Kamarpukur in Bengal, there was a Brahmin gentleman named Khudiram. Sri Hari Himself requested Khudiram that he would be born as his son, in the same way as Dasaratha and Vasudeva, who were blessed with this boon in olden times after intense austerity (tapas) for several years. Subsequently Khudiram was blessed with a son, who was born as an aspect of Gadadhar. Khudiram's life became fulfilled by the birth of his son, whom he named as Gadadhar and who later became the world teacher Ramakrishna Paramahamsa.

Gadadhar had no inclination for education oriented towards livelihood. Even from childhood, the boy was averse to worldly life. Following the instructions of his elder brother Ramkumar, Gadadhar willingly and happily went with him to Kalighat (Kolkata). Subsequently he went along with his brother to Dakshineswar, where he remained as a devotee of Kali for the rest of his life. Gradually while being engaged in serving Goddess Kali, as a priest in the Dakshineswar, he developed such intense devotion to the Goddess that he had the vision of Kalika Devi and started conversing with her. He was engaged for most of the time in meditation and worship. Paramahamsa Deva, even while living with his wife, used to go into Samadhi whenever he wished. He impressed even his teachers, Bhairavi Brahmani and Totapuri with his spiritual power and patience. He, the Compassionate One, appeared in the world to show God to spiritual seekers. He trained with love his disciples who subsequently became guiding forces of the world in the path of yoga. With deep yearning, he waited for those disciples who were enthusiastic for spiritual progress, the lover of disciples that he was. Sri Ramakrishna attracted pure-souled ones like Narendra. He attracted them like a magnet attracts iron and Narendra was the foremost among them. Motivated by his relative Ramachandra Dutta, Narendra once met in Dakshineswar, the Paramahamsa whom even by that time several well-known personalities held in high esteem. These included scholars and devotees like Sashadhar, Gouri pandit, Vijaykrishna Goswami as well as orators like Keshav Chandra Sen. Followers of different traditions – Hindus, Muslims, Christians, etc. who were sincere in their own separate paths got elevated in their respective paths by their association with him.

Sri Ramakrishna taught that the goal of all religions is God realization and the paths differ according to the experiences of the wise. This type of teaching was what was needed for the society for avoiding mutual conflicts among different schools of thought.

Teachings of Paramahamsa Deva

परमहंसालापः

By a mere look at Narendra, the world teacher Sri Ramakrishna was overwhelmed with joy and requested him as follows, "Please sing a song." Narendra then sang a beautiful song, filled with devotion, in a melodious voice. "Why do you roam here O mind, in lowly places and dry lands without any happiness and with utmost misery? Attain your peace in your own place (in your own mind) which is really a beautiful garden with cool salutary water, pleasant waves of breeze and filled with enchanting trees bearing delicious fruits." After listening to this song of Narendra, the Guru took him to a solitary place and joyfully told him as follows, "You delayed for too long in coming here my dear (boy). I have been waiting for you for countless years." Having said this and having given tasty dishes to eat, he asked Narendra to come again. Sri Ramakrishna had a deep longing to see Narendranath again.

After a long time, Narendra came again. Ramakrishna used to praise Narendra in front of others. He joyfully said, "Look at this nice boy. He is highly intelligent, with Goddess Saraswati residing in him. On his face is seen pure light which is impossible for others." Subsequently Sri Ramakrishna ascertained from Narendra that he saw a luminous light before sleeping. Seeing this kind of behavior of Sri Ramakrishna, Narendra was surprised at the insight of his Guru and began reasoning in his mind as follows, "He may be mad or Mahatma, but still he is certainly a supreme yogi." Thinking thus, he asked his Guru the same question that he had asked Devendranath earlier, "Bhagavan, have you seen God?" Listening to this question, his Guru spontaneously replied, "Yes my boy, I have seen God more clearly than I see you now. I can show Him to you too. Do not have any doubt about it. You will be able to converse with Him too if you have intense yearning for seeing God. People weep for children or money in this world but who weeps for God?" Hearing these words of his Guru, Narendra was surprised. Feeling happy in his mind, Narendra thought within himself, "He may appear to be mad, but he is a genuine yogi, who is saturated with knowledge and wisdom, and is a self-realized person." Thus having got full faith in him, Narendra became content in his mind.

Long ago, Lord Krishna longing for the darshan of Lord Shiva requested Upamanyu, the Ocean of Mercy, and obtained from him spiritual instruction and felt happy in his mind. Likewise, after listening to his Guru and taking his leave, Narendra left with his mind full of ecstatic reflections on him. Drawn by the attraction of Sri Ramakrishna, Narendra went to Dakshineswar on foot after one month. Feeling overwhelmed by the sight of Narendra, Sri

Ramakrishna made him sit by his side on his cot. Then Sri Ramakrishna said to Narendra as follows, "You are not an ordinary person. You are the Maharshi Nara incarnated in this world. I have been longing to see you. Fortunately, we met and I could talk with you. My ears and mind have dried up listening to the futile talk with the worldly minded people, whose minds are averse to talk of God and spiritual matters. You have the same power of Lord Shiva in you as in me. There is no difference between us. You always keep this in mind."

Then Sri Ramakrishna touched Narendra with his right foot and made him talk. Bhagavan showed instantly his universal form in which the entire moving and unmoving entities entered. Just as Arjuna in ancient times was confounded on the battlefield with the dualities related to the present and future lives, in the same way, Narendra said in a deluded mood, "What are you doing to me? I have my own people at home." The Guru smiled at his words and said, "This much is enough for now. The rest you will gain in due course." After that, he started telling the story of a ghost, "Once a man became a ghost after death. He was looking for a companion. He went eagerly to a person who just died thinking that he would get a companion. However, whoever died in his knowledge obtained salvation due to his punya, and the ghost was left without a companion. Seeing you, I thought I got an understanding companion after a long time, but you say in an agitated mood, 'I have my own people at home'. What can I do? I am left without company in the same way as the ghost." When Narendra became conscious, he thought, "What happened to me now? Is it magic or illusion? I shall never again be carried away by his influence."

When Narendra went again to his Guru, he lost his consciousness in the same way as on the previous occasion through a mere touch of Sri Ramakrishna. In that state, Narendra told his Guru several subtle personal aspects of his character, nature and qualities, the various acts which he liked to do and which still have to be completed as well as several others, all of which Sri Ramakrishna had already known. On learning various things from Narendra on inquiry, Sri Ramakrishna recollected the vision he had once in an ecstatic state. Before his meeting with Narendra, Sri Ramakrishna in his vision saw a light coming from Varanasi and going towards Kolkata in the morning hours, which thereafter proceeded towards the sky (indicating the advent of Narendra). Another time, Sri Ramakrishna's mind, immersed in samadhi, soared fast towards the sky and went beyond the group of stars to the realm of the Saptarshi Mandalam where the light assumed the form of a boy and went to the Seven Rishis there. There the boy touched one of the Rishis with his tender hands and requested him to come to the earth with him. Feeling the delicate touch, the Rishi came out of his meditation and opened his eyes, looked with affection at the tender boy and conveyed by his look, his approval to accompany him. The Maharshi was Narendra and the boy was Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna realized that the earth could not hold the radiance of the Maharshi and a fragment of it would be adequate to achieve great tasks in the world. On the touch of his Guru, Narendra's life was transformed. Sri Ramakrishna tested Narendra in this way for

convincing himself that Narendra was the same Rishi and would in future become the Sun of knowledge and that his life would shine all the more as a result of the purifying influence of several adversities, in the same way as the fragrance of a flower would spread all around as a result of the impact of wind.

Chapter 4

Clearing of Doubts

संकोचापगमः

Even though he was just a young boy, Narendra received high praise from the world teacher Ramakrishna in front of several people, "This boy was in a previous life, a Maharshi. He is perfect in meditation, brilliant, courageous, highly enthusiastic, and pure in heart and a supreme person in all respects. If Keshav Chandra Sen shines among elders with just one merit, there are several such supreme merits in Narendra, which people in general cannot think of imagining. Lord Shiva shines clearly residing in his heart. If anybody even unknowingly finds fault with him taking him to be a mere boy, he gets the sin of blaming Lord Shiva Himself. There are no restrictions at all regarding food, etc. for him." Narendra said to his Guru who was thus talking about him, "If you cherish such excessive affection for me, will you not fall into a lowly state like Jada Bharata who was obsessively attracted to a deer?" Hearing these words of Narendra, the Guru, the innocent soul that he was, ran in a perturbed state of mind to Mother Kali. Having been reassured by Kali, he came back and said, "Enough of your prattling. I shall never again believe you. I love you, seeing Lord Narayana in you." In this way, the Master bound his disciple with the bond of love.

Once the Guru did not talk with Narendra for several days. Subsequently, he asked him, "Why do you keep coming even though I never talk to you?" In reply, Narendra said with obedience, devotion and love, "I am here not merely for listening to you but out of love for you too." Once Narendra was arguing thus, "This pot is Brahman, that cloth is Brahman! How is it possible?" displaying his debating skill. Seeing Narendra arguing thus, Sri Ramakrishna touched Narendra. Instantly Narendra lost his consciousness and witnessed the external world disappear. Even hitting against the wall, he did not feel pain. In that state, he stayed for some days. He could not eat food given by his mother. His mother said, "Why are you keeping quiet? Eat my boy." Then he started eating, feeling hungry. Thereafter, his faith in his Guru got fully established. He was convinced by this about the validity of Advaita.

Once Narendra displayed his argumentative nature and said, "There is no person like Radha. She was the mere creation of poets. Her devotion to Krishna was fantasy and there is nothing divine in that." Even while Narendra was thus disputing and rejecting the love between Radha and Krishna, Sri Ramakrishna said as follows regarding the meaning behind that, "Even if Radha were false and the gopis also false, how can their divine love for Krishna be false? Being unable to bear their separation from Sri Krishna Paramatma, they went on searching for Him forgetting their husbands and children. On obtaining Sri Krishna's darshan, they were in ecstasy which is described as Rasa Leela. Without breaking from the bondage of Samsara, how can the devotee obtain Paramatma?" Listening to these

priceless words, Narendra was fully convinced. The same idea was resounded by Swami Vivekananda in later days, in his lectures on Bhakti Yoga.

Pondering over the words that just as a good merchant does not buy any item without testing, so also a disciple should not accept the teacher without first testing him, Narendra once had a desire to test his Guru's quality of renunciation acquired through the power of his yoga. In his Guru's absence, Narendra kept a coin under his bed. Later Sri Ramakrishna jumped up with intense pain on just touching the bed, as if bitten by a serpent. Narendra was astounded on seeing this impulsive reaction from his Guru. On learning about the test attempted by his disciple, Sri Ramakrishna felt happy and lovingly appreciated him saying, "You acted well." This type of testing of the teacher by Narendra prompted the other disciples too to do likewise. That kind of intimacy existed between the teacher and the disciples.

Examining the limbs of Narendra, Sri Ramakrishna said, "Your astrological indications are perfectly alright. Even so you experience heavy breathing during sleep. So you will not have a long life. You are of a renunciative and dispassionate temperament, but never will you be a dry scholar." Again addressing the other disciples assembled near him, Sri Ramakrishna told about Narendra the following, "Narendra is like the Homa bird, described in the Vedas. After coming out of the egg in the sky and descending, the Homa bird develops wings and it feels aghast on seeing the earth below. Thereafter, it will soar high towards the sky and thus never touch the earth. Likewise, Narendra is ever going higher in spiritual planes and will never develop worldly tendencies. In him shines the light of knowledge like a lotus with thousand petals." When Sri Ramakrishna offered Narendra supernatural powers, the latter gently rejected them after he was told that they would not help him in God-realization and Moksha.

Chapter 5

Evolution of Personality

प्रतिभा–विकासः

That education which helps in character and self-confidence, and also helps in acquiring self-knowledge, that alone is true education. Any other education is fruitless. In the scriptures, the word 'Manīsha' is used to indicate a person who has the determination to acquire self-knowledge.

Narendra's special subjects in college were history and philosophy (Easter and Western). Further, he studied law, English and Bengali literature exhaustively while he was doing his graduation. His thirst for knowledge was not satiated with these studies and his eagerness to understand Vedanta increased with time. In day-to-day life, he was full of joy and enthusiasm, and he used to converse even with aged persons and make them laugh happily with his entertaining and humorous talk. He never used to waste his time in futile gossip, but used to engage his time in study of books, meditation and music. His appearance was awe-inspiring to his friends with his broad brow, dignified face, strong body – neither too tall nor too short – and with lotus-like eyes. He impressed everybody he came across with his upright conduct and shining qualities radiating divinity. In later days, Swami Vivekananda once said that he was externally a Jnani but was full of devotion inside, while his Guru was a devotee outside but a Jnani inside.

The Winter of Misfortune

दुर्दशाहेमन्तः

In 1884, when Narendra's bachelor's degree examination was over, there occurred in their house a major mishap by way of the death of his father. Being the eldest son in the family, Narendra performed the last rites as per the scriptural injunctions and with a heavy heart laden with grief. Due to the betrayal and deceit of relatives who were like vultures pouncing on his parental property, and the failure to get justice from court, the house which had been the abode of Mahalakshmi (Lakshmi Vilasa Nilayam) now became ridden with penury, through inscrutable destiny.

When Narendra was seen praying to and thinking of God in those dire circumstances, his mother, feeling piqued with helplessness at the turn of events, said to him, "How can we continue with our lives in these conditions?" Narendra could not get any job in spite of trying. When he went home after his attempts for a job, he used to tell his mother that he had his meal with a friend who had invited him, just to avoid sharing the little food available

at home and enable his family members to stifle their hunger. Later when a rich woman requested him to marry her, Narendra rejected her request in spite of his abject condition of poverty. Subsequently, he wanted to go to his Guru to appraise him of the pitiable state of his family. Having no other recourse, he went to see him and told him about the difficulties he was facing. Listening to his words, his Gurudeva told him, "For your sake, I prayed to the Divine Mother several times, but she said that you do not have faith in her. You yourself go and pray to her. Mother is full of love and compassion." Having been advised thus, Narendra went to pray to Kalika Devi but in Her divine presence, he could not beg for money. "O Mother, give me bhakti, jnana and vairagya." – He prayed in this way again and again at the lotus feet of Kali.

When he returned to the Master, the latter asked him, "Have you asked Her?" Narendra, with his head bent with shame, told his Guru, "Bhagavan! It is your play that I could not ask for money." When Narendra said this, his Guru, full of compassion, consoled him saying, "My boy, from now on, there will not be any difficulty for livelihood in your house." From this event, Narendra got strengthened and he also got faith in image worship.

Chapter 6

The Divine Master – Spring of Compassion

गुरुदेवदयावसन्तः

Sri Ramakrishna in the form of Vasanthalakshmi of love and compassion, made the pure qualities of Narendra unfold like lotuses and made him exceedingly agreeable to the people around. Narendra was being trained in the practice of meditation by his Guru. At one time, it so happened that he was disturbed several times in his meditation by the noise from a factory. Learning about this hindrance to his disciple's meditation, Sri Ramakrishna told him, "Concentrate your mind on the sound of that siren itself." Following this instruction of his Guru, Narendra got rid of the disturbance in his mind and thereby was immersed in such deep meditation that he became totally unaware of his body.

Once Sri Ramakrishna pressed his nail at the center of Narendra's brow and said to him, "Concentrate steadily on this place." Following this instruction, Narendra went into deep meditation. In this way, he was involved in various kinds of practices of meditation, along with his brother disciples. He used to engage himself with them in various activities such as exchanging humorous anecdotes and enjoying different playful activities like running, climbing trees, jumping, swimming and such others. Narendra used to spend his time happily being engaged in activities normal to young boys, like participating in eating nice food in picnics in gardens including the holy Dakshineswar gardens. Even though Narendra was a Kshatriya by birth, his Gurudeva used to feed him with his own hands, considering him to be pure without any blemish. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that right from his birth Narendra was never deluded, because of his pure character, guileless nature and discriminative faculty. He said, "Mahamaya who is the source of delusion for everyone cannot at any time approach Narendra." Saying this, he prayed to the Divine Mother Kali as follows, "Mother, envelope this boy in Your Maya. Otherwise, he would be forever immersed in deep meditation and would not be able to devote himself to the tasks he came to perform for the welfare of the world."

Sri Ramakrishna never gave long discourses to his disciples. Instead he used to enlighten their minds by concise instructions, anecdotes and songs. In that way, he used to clear any doubts arising in their minds. He used to say to his disciples, the affectionate teacher that he was, "When God-realization comes, there is no scope for doubts or discussions. In a feast, there would be mutual talking as long as food is not served. Once food is served and people start eating, there would be silence and people would be engaged in eating." At one time when Narendra and other disciples were engaged in loud, long-winded discussions, quoting from scriptures, on whether God is with or without attributes, Sri Ramakrishna, having finished his meditation, cameS to them in a peaceful frame of mind and sang a melodious song, "O mind! You can never understand God by intellectual reasoning. He can be realized

only by bhakti and not by mere human effort." Listening to that soul-stirring song, the disciples understood the essence of the nature of God, and their doubts were all cleared.

Once Narendra asked, "We can never realize God by blind faith. How can we get rid of foolish blind faith?" Then his Guru replied, "Faith is always blind, neither foolish nor wise. The essence of the scriptures must be grasped by self-realization. Without self-realization, a person's knowledge of scriptures is bound to be blind. Scriptures declare that guidance given to others by learned pundits without self-realization is like blind leading the blind. Without the yearning to understand the nature of God, all kinds of arguments regarding what is truth and what is untruth are futile. Only after great effort pursued without break and with full faith and devotion, and with a purified mind, Sadhaka can realize God. Further, a spiritual aspirant should ignore the taunts from others and treat everyone with respect."

God resides equally in all beings. Narayana is present in wicked and gentle animals. He plays eternally assuming ferocious as well as mild forms. He becomes yogi Narayana as well as cruel Narayana. So, one should not find fault with those who are engaged in worshipping minor deities, since they too are endeavoring to attain God with full faith. Some people enter through the main door while some others get in through the back door. Likewise, there are different ways of reaching God. The main door signifying Satvik approach is to be preferred. God can be meditated upon in different ways. Renunciation of lust and greed is the essential requirement. Questions regarding how to serve God such as whether He has to be worshipped as with attributes or without attributes, whether in kshetra or tirtha, in images or otherwise, etc. are irrelevant. God can be worshipped in some way or other since He is all-pervading Paramatma. Feeling intimacy with God and adopting a loving relationship with all, one has to feel the presence of Purushottama in every being. This is the essence of all religions and faiths.

It may be mentioned in this context that all Jagadgurus (world teachers) have practiced and taught this, and great persons like Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore also taught in the same vein.

Paramahamsa had practiced other religions too. He taught that a spiritual aspirant should never adopt a dry attitude but should possess a sweet nature involving compassion for all beings, engage himself in devout practices like chanting the names of God and praising His attributes. He thereby acquires attraction to God. He should serve devotees of God and work for the welfare of the world.

Once Sri Ramakrishna asked Narendra, "If God were a glass of nectar and you were a honey bee, what would you do?" Narendra replied, "I would sit at the edge of the glass and sip the honey." Listening to this reply, Sri Ramakrishna laughed and said, "Oh! You seem to be innocent. The glass is filled with nectar. You should say that you will get drowned in it. There is no danger of death since God is the nectar of immortality." Once some devotees, including Nitya Gopal and Manomohan, were rolling on the ground in ecstasy of devotion.

Looking at them, Narendra asked his teacher, "How shall I get that kind of experience?" Sri Ramakrishna replied discouraging him from such ideas, "Those boys who get overcome with insignificant experiences of ecstasy are like a cottage that gets shattered or a small pond in which the water is in turmoil on the entry of an elephant. You should be like Mandakini that is not disturbed and should not get carried away by minor emotions of ecstasy".

Narendra again and again put pressure on Sri Ramakrishna for giving him the experience of Nirvikalpa Samadhi. Sri Ramakrishna told him with sympathy in his tone, "My boy, there is a state higher than that. You yourself sing that one should see God in every being." However, on Narendra's repeated requests, Sri Ramakrishna once granted him the experience of Nirvikalpa Samadhi. Established in the state of Samadhi, Narendra shouted to those near him, "Where are my feet and hands?" Those who were near him were astounded looking at him, ran to Sri Ramakrishna and apprised him of Narendra's condition. Sri Ramakrishna then told those disciples, "Let him stay in that state for a while. He has been pestering me for that experience by repeated requests for quite some time." Narendra remained in the state of Nirvikalpa Samadhi for a very long time.

When Narendra came to know that a rich woman liked him, the pure-hearted one prayed to his Gurudeva and rejected her proposal with ease. Having come to know about the attempts of his family members and relatives to get Narendra married, Sri Ramakrishna prayed to the Divine Mother, "Foil their attempts, Mother! Let not Narendra get drowned in the bondage of worldly life but make him take up a sacred renunciative life." Then Sri Ramakrishna, out of pity, sought the help of a rich person for Narendra's family to tide over their financial difficulties. Learning about this, Narendra who was full of self-respect felt upset and protested to his Guru. Upon this, the merciful Master consoled him saying, "My boy, what shall I not do for your sake in this world? I shall even go about begging if it is in your interest. Do not have any doubt about it." In later days, Swami Vivekananda remembering this intense love of his Guru said, "Our Master bound me as well as other devotees with the firm bond of his love." By imparting spiritual knowledge in this way, the great world teacher Sri Ramakrishna made Narendra the ruler of the kingdom of spirituality. What a great fortune for Narendra that he was chosen as heir to Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual wealth even though there were several other disciples under him, in the same way as Hanuman was treated by Sri Rama and Arjuna by Sri Krishna.

Sri Ramakrishna was like a father to Narendra. When Sri Ramakrishna became ill with throat problems, he was taken to Kolkata for treatment and all the disciples looked after him. Sarada Mata served him by doing cooking and other household chores. Some disciples under the leadership of Narendra were serving Sri Ramakrishna. Mahendralal Sarkar, a famous physician, attended to him. When Dr. Sarkar praised Narendra, Sri Ramakrishna approvingly said, "Just as Chaitanya avatara came for Advaita Acharya, I have come to the world for Narendra's sake." The Master did not abstain from his teaching in spite of his severe throat problem (later diagnosed as cancer). Such was his non-attachment to the body. Sri

Ramakrishna's sickness did not abate in spite of the treatment and the medicines became useless. When Narendra saw the disciples being involved in their attempts to roll on the ground and cry in ecstatic moods, he discouraged such activities which were treated by him as superficial external manifestations without deep devotion being involved in them. Girish Chandra Ghosh, Vijay Krishna Goswami and a few others considered Sri Ramakrishna as an incarnation of God.

When Sri Ramakrishna's throat problem took a serious turn in the year 1885, the Master was moved by Narendra and others to Cossipore in the suburbs of Kolkata, where a garden house with beautiful ambience and gentle breeze was taken on rent. When Sashadhar pandit and other devotees, out of their intense love for Sri Ramakrishna, told him that he could cure himself by his mere wish, the Master replied, "How can I, in a foolish manner, turn my mind which is surrendered to the lotus feet of the Lord on to this insignificant body?" The devotees on hearing this were dumbfounded. When his disciple Durga Charan Nag, known as Nag Mahasaya, approached Sri Ramakrishna saying that he would take his disease on his own body by the power of his yoga, Sri Ramakrishna told him, "I know that you are capable of that. Once I myself prayed to God saying, 'O Mother, you make me a little better since I am not able to eat anything.' Then the Mother asked me, 'Are you not eating through the mouths of all beings?' Chastised by the Mother in this way, I was silenced forever."

During this period, the disciples had several spiritual experiences due to their Guru's grace. Intending to prepare them for the future order of monks, Sri Ramakrishna instructed them to go out and beg for food. As per their Master's orders, they went from house to house constantly chanting the names of God, collecting rice and other provisions. Partaking of the food brought by his disciples who were thus purified, Sri Ramakrishna said – "This food is very sacred and is the Prasad of God." Calling Narendra, Sri Ramakrishna joyously told him, "Look at these boys, my child. I am keeping them in your charge. You need to train them in spiritual practice."

Narendra started constantly practicing intense austerity following a strict discipline and several times lost consciousness of his body. Once Girish found Narendra meditating under a tree. He saw that his body was covered with mosquitoes. Yet Narendra was not conscious of his body, deeply involved in meditation. At one time, Narendra when he was in Samadhi touched his brother disciple Kali (later known as Swami Abhedananda) who became fully immersed in meditation due to the flow of power from Narendra caused by the touch. Learning about this, Sri Ramakrishna told Narendra, "You should not again do this kind of immature act in future, my boy. Spiritual practice when not done gradually in regular stages would result in serious mishap." Once Sri Ramakrishna called Rakhal and Narendra, and told them, "Mother Kali brought this disease on me knowing my innocent nature. Otherwise, I would have disbursed the spiritual treasure on one and all without taking into account their fitness or otherwise for the same. Once Narendra asked his Master, "What would happen to the thirst for God-realization without renunciation of the world?". Sri Ramakrishna replied,

"Know that everything in the universe is Brahman. One who has no attachment or desire for any worldly object will in his life have a firm conviction that the whole universe is Brahman and his behavior towards all will be in that spirit." Narendra understood the import of this teaching and never deviated from his sense of identification with every being in the world. Having realized that his disciple understood the gist of his teaching, Sri Ramakrishna initiated him with Rama Mantra which is very dear to him.

The flood of the nectar of spiritual energy

शक्तिपातमधुपूरः

After that, the Master gave Sannyasa Deeksha to the eligible disciples by donning them with gerua cloth and Rudraksha mala. He called Narendra and transmitted his spiritual energy into him through a series of luminous waves with the intention that in future he would bring good to the world through spiritual power. Then looking at his disciple when he came out of deep Samadhi caused by the spiritual power received by him, the Master said with tearful eyes, "My boy, I gave you today, with the grace of Goddess Kali, all my spiritual wealth and I have become a pauper. You must engage yourself in spreading this wealth throughout the world. I have locked the knowledge and kept in my hand the key to it. After you complete the task I assigned to you in this world, I shall hand over the key to you and you shall realize your real nature."

Who can understand the depth of renunciation of the Master who gave all his spiritual wealth in the same way as one gives a flower or such an object? Doing pranams at the feet of his Guru, Narendra who later became Swami Vivekananda left him full of gratitude in his mind. When the Master was in intense suffering prior to his Niryanam, Narendra had a fleeting thought in his mind to understand whether his Guru was aware of his Avatarhood in this critical juncture. Realizing the doubt in his disciple's mind, Sri Ramakrishna, in spite of his critical state when he could not speak at all, told in crystal clear words, "He who was Rama and Krishna, that One is now Ramakrishna in this body, but not in the sense of your Advaita philosophy." The disciple thus got fully established in his faith that Sri Ramakrishna was an Avatara, and realized his true nature and greatness.

The Winter of Master's departure from the world

गुरुनिर्याणशिशिरः

In the year 1886 on August 16 (Bhadrapada Krishna Vijaya), the world teacher Sri Ramakrishna uttered the name of Kali three times and left his physical body and reached the

eternal abode. The Supreme Soul, Paramahamsa left the body just like discarding old clothes, leaving behind the grief-ridden devotees. Like a royal swan flying to the sky, Paramahamsa Deva entered the illimitable abode of God, making the Cossipore Garden house represent the entire Universe. Wearing their saffron clothes and chanting God's name, his disciples carried his physical body consisting of the five elements to Cossipore cremation ground and carried out the last rites. They carried the sacred relics, the holiest of the holy, in a vessel. "The Gurudeva has left only his physical body constituted of the five elements and not us." With this thought, they obtained peace of mind.

Chapter 7

Dispassionate Living

निर्लिप्तजीवनम्

The disciples of Sri Ramakrishna kept their Gurudeva's relics in a copper vessel and started worshipping it every day. They took a dilapidated house on rent which became the origin of the Baranagar house that subsequently became Ramakrishna Math and Sevagram for sadhus. Each of the disciples took a pinch of their Gurudeva's ashes on his tongue as Prasad. Subsequently the disciples retained the relics as a supreme object of meditation. There arose a dispute between the disciples and the householder devotees regarding the right to ownership of the relics. This became a source of intense agony in the mind of Sri Sarada Devi. Narendra resolved the dispute regarding the possession of the relics of their Guru, "Let us not contest in this way. We are all dear to our Guru." He suggested to the group of disciples to divide the relics into two parts. The portion retained by the disciples was kept in an urn and worshipped in Baranagar for six years. Subsequently, the Math was shifted to Alambazar near Dakshineswar and the worship was continued there. The disciples performed regular worship at that place for a few years. After five years, it was taken from there to the house of Nilambar Mukhopadhyaya. Thereafter, the urn was taken to Belur Math with Swamiji carrying it on his head. While keeping it in the temple, Swamiji recollected the words of Sri Ramakrishna "I shall go wherever you take me and thereafter stay in that place." Swamiji's eyes were filled with tears of intense devotion when what Sri Ramakrishna had said came back to his mind. From that time onwards, the spot where the relics were kept became the permanent central place for offering worship and the haven for all the devout persons. It also became a sacred Math on earth dedicated to Sri Ramakrishna. It became famous as a center of holiness.

Having mentioned about the developments that were to take place subsequent to the renting of the Baranagar house, let us come back to the unique history related to the life of the disciples while in Baranagar. The disciples of Sri Ramakrishna in Baranagar spent their time happily without any desire. Being satisfied with whatever is available, be it vegetable or fruit, they were spending their time in japa and meditation. They used to eat the food given by Shashi who took upon himself the entire burden of taking care of the other disciples as regards their sustenance. The disciples used to debate frequently among themselves about eastern and western philosophies. Swamiji himself was the leader in the arguments and counter arguments. He was leading discussion on the existence or otherwise of God, sometimes saying that God existed and sometimes not. With his extraordinary talent in arguments and discussions, displaying his intelligence and wisdom, he caused amazement among the other disciples. In the discussions, he would sometimes refute Christian doctrines and again at other times establish the teachings of Jesus Christ as valid. On sacred festivals like Shivaratri and Krishnashtami, the disciples participated along with lay devotees in

spending time in japa, meditation and singing of devotional songs. Swamiji in association with his brother disciples, used to sing songs in praise of Lord Shiva written and composed by himself. They worshipped in the morning in ritualistic manner performing homa, etc. Being great sannyasis, they used to meticulously follow the injunctions of the scriptures, full of devotion and respect for their sanctity. When the fathers of the disciples came to take their sons back home, Swamiji used to dissuade his brother monks from consenting to go back. He used to say, "We are striving hard to our utmost capacity to realize God. Why should we go back and return to the lowly worldly life?" Swamiji thought within himself that if his goal of life is not fulfilled, he should have the firm determination to give up his life through prayopavesa. At such times he remembered that if he gave up his life, Sri Ramakrishna's desire that he should lead the other disciples in their spiritual path would not be achieved. Further, his objective of establishing a Math in the name of Sri Ramakrishna would not be fulfilled.

The Fragrance of Experiences – Pilgrimage of North India

अनुभवसौरभम् – उत्तरभारतयात्रा

Some disciples of Sri Ramakrishna went to the Himalayas and some others accompanied Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi to Vrindavan. Swamiji wanted to get out of the "golden chains of bondage" of association with his brother disciples and go about as a free monk. So without any attachment, without possessions and alone, he went to Varanasi, the famous pilgrimage center and the abode of God. Varanasi is the abode of Lord Shiva and his consort, the daughter of Himavanta. There he met the famous yogi Bhaskarananda and Bhudeva Mukherjee. Swamiji made enquiries about the eminent scholars in Varanasi who were well versed in scriptures. He learnt the scriptures from them. The scholars were full of praise for the extraordinary intelligence and talent of Swamiji.

Once in Varanasi, he was chased by a group of monkeys and started running fast in fear of them. Seeing him running, a Sannyasi shouted to him, "Stay where you are and face them in courage. You can achieve nothing if you are afraid." With this incident, it became clear to Swamiji that the monkey of Maya will run away in fear when faced by a brave person. What is there to tell now? Swamiji turned back and faced the monkeys which started receding fast. After completing the pilgrimage of Varanasi, Swamiji went to Ayodhya and felt in that place the divine presence of Ramachandra of ideal and illustrious life and character. Thereafter, he visited Agra where he saw the wonder of the world Taj Mahal, a unique symbol of love. From there he went to Vrindavan situated near Mathura. In Vrindavan, he was in ecstasy at the sacred abode of the Gopis of Vrajabhumi, the dust of whose lotus feet is hard to attain even for Devas. Swamiji then went to the famous pilgrimage center of Vaishnavas, Radha Kunda. On the way, while taking bath in a bathing ghat at some place, some monkeys took

away his loincloth (kaupina). By God's grace somebody made him happy by giving him a kashaya cloth. Subsequently, he was surprised to get back his loincloth. In Haridwar he came across a railway officer by name Sharat Chandra, who honored him by playing host to him. Having been influenced by the brilliance of Swamiji, Sharat Chandra renounced his family life and took to sannyasa. Later he was known as Swami Sadananda. At that time, he served Swamiji who became ill.

While going to Rishikesh, on the way Swamiji visited the great yogi Pavahari Baba, a distinguished Mahatma who had great adoration for Sri Ramakrishna. Pavahari Baba was well versed in scriptures and vyakarana. He was an adept in hatha yoga. Swamiji had a desire to learn hatha yoga from him. But his Guru Sri Ramakrishna appeared in a vision and dissuaded him from that pursuit.

At this time Swamiji came to know about the demise of Balaram Babu and became very sad. Premdas said to him in a perverted way, "Being an all-renouncing monk, how can you feel such sorrow at this news?" Swamiji retorted, "Just being a monk does not mean that the heart becomes dry." Swamiji went back to Kolkata. He wanted to build a temple for Sri Ramakrishna on the banks of Ganga near Dakshineswar and sought the blessings of Holy Mother Sarada Devi. Having obtained her blessings, he went again to Varanasi to do tapas. From there he went to Vaidyanath and again returned to Varanasi. He instructed Premdas to pursue the study and contemplation of scriptures. Swamiji further said about himself that he would certainly come back to Varanasi and burst upon society like a bombshell and establish Truth defeating opposition from any side. From there, Swamiji went to Himalayas, the father-in-law of Shiva and the Lord of the mountains, and also the abode of inimitable glory, in whose shadow had grown the supreme culture, the limitless customs and spiritual practices of Bharat, the country unique on the face of earth with its rich spiritual treasures of Vedic sciences.

Having gone to the Himalayas, he went to visit the famous Badarikashrama. Sitting in meditation under a tree on his way, he clearly experienced the unity of microcosm and macrocosm (pindanda and brahmanda). He later said that he had come to know about the death of his sister and wept bitterly with intense sorrow. Then discriminating within himself, he remembered his intrinsic nature of detachment and recovered his poise. From there he went to Srinagar and came back again to Rishikesh. He did intense tapas while in Rishikesh subsisting on begging. There he saw some sages immersed in Turiya and Nirvikalpa states. He had discussions with them on our Holy Scriptures and Puranas. After that, for understanding the philosophic concepts, he studied several volumes on philosophy, getting them from a library. He completed one volume per day and could convince others of his knowledge gained from the books by answering their questions with precision. Those who asked questions were amazed at his memory and his capacity to grasp the meaning of the scriptures in such a short time.

Having gone to Haridwar, he saw there some sages of intense austerity, and Avadhutas enjoying the supreme bliss of God-realization. They were totally unaware of their bodies and for them even hitting them with stones did not cause any pain. Talking about them, Swamiji said in his later discourses, "For such sadhus, their austerity and discipline are more effective than visiting pilgrimage centers. They lead their lives giving up mundane pursuits and the conventions of the society, and yet they are full of compassion for humanity." Swamiji arrived in Delhi towards the fag end of the nineteenth century, after completing his pilgrimage. For the purpose of living in solitude, he gave up the company of even his brother monks. From Delhi, Swamiji went to Rajputana province and met the king of the province in Alwar. He understood that the king had a lack of faith in idol worship. To correct this, Swamiji demonstrated to him that just as it is considered defilement to spit on a picture of the king since it represents the king, in a similar way people look upon the idol of God as signifying God and offer worship to the idol. Thus he explained the significance of idol worship as an expression of devotion to God.

Swamiji impressed Moulvi (Muslim teacher) by his knowledge and understanding of the Quran. Several persons were attracted by Swamiji's discourses, some of which were in Sanskrit. After listening to his discourses in impeccable Sanskrit with use of choice expressions, several persons of the city were motivated to learn Sanskrit.

From Alwar, Swamiji went to Jaipur. The first photo of Swamiji as a wandering monk was taken in that place. From there he went to Mount Abu and met the head of the place who asked a boon from Swamiji for a son. Entering the town Limidi, he was trapped by some people who were involved in low level devotional practices. He was saved from them by the king of the place.

Pilgrimage of South India

दक्षिणभारतयात्रा

After seeing Bal Gangadhar Tilak in Pune, Swamiji went to meet the Maharaja of Mysore. The Maharaja too was charmed with the sharp intellect and inimitable voice of Swamiji. He recorded Swamiji's voice on a gramophone record. Swamiji went thereafter to Rameswaram to have darshan of Lord Ramalinga Swami in the famous Rameswaram temple. Subsequently, he went to visit Kanyakumari. There he sat on a rock (in the sea) and meditated for three days on the dismal poverty of the common people of Bharat. Swamiji, inspired by a divine emotion from within himself, took a vow – "Going to Western countries, I shall broadcast in a trumpet call, the greatness of the cultural values and noble traditions of India." Thus he proved himself to be a supreme patriot. This vow of the lord of yogis was taken in the midst of roaring waves and made the conjunction of the three seas extremely happy. The rock on which Swamiji had been immersed in deep meditation was named after him and is now the

famous Vivekananda Rock. It inspires the visitors even now, and shows the Swamiji in the light of a Mahatma.

In society, whatever the distinguished persons, seers, kings and monks do will be emulated by their followers. In those days, whatever discourses Swamiji gave dealt with subjects like how we should live and about education. He explained them in a lucid way. The lives of persons of wisdom are replete with experiences on how they faced with courage the obstacles in their endeavors. Education without experience and without discrimination is of no avail. Swamiji himself was a perfect example of his wise teachings.

At one time, Swamiji while going to some place was famished, fatigued and exhausted. He was sitting in a railway station. When he was suffering from intense hunger, a person eating nice food started mocking Swamiji, saying "This will be the condition of sadhus." Swamiji ignored these jibes of that person. In the meantime, another person came with food, spread it before Swamiji and said to him, "I was sent by Bhagavan Ramachandra, waking me up from my sleep to take this food and give it to you." This is an example of God's love for His devotees. On another occasion, Swamiji was continuously conversing with a group of persons who were eagerly listening to the lucid words of wisdom emanating from him. The discussions went on for hours together, but no one among the audience thought that Swamiji might be hungry and needed to eat something. Meanwhile, a cobbler came with a meal and gave it to Swamiji who praised him with the words, "Even the food brought in a golden plate by Indra himself will not be as tasty as what you brought for me." Once Swamiji decided to give up his body through prayopavesa. While walking in a forest with this thought in his mind, Swamiji came across a tiger in the path and sat close to it. He reasoned within himself, "I shall become food for this tiger." But the tiger simply looked at him and went away from there. At another time, Swamiji was without food for three days. In that condition, he fell down and became unconscious while walking around. Then there was a heavy downpour and he got fully drenched. He regained consciousness and to his amazement got energized anew. There were several incidents of this kind in Swamiji's life which proved to him the presence of latent strength (atmashakti) within oneself. In this way, Swamiji faced the obstacles with courage and self-confidence. The Upanishads declare as follows: 1) The Atman is obtained by whom It chooses. 2) Arise and enlighten yourself by resorting to the great (teachers). The other exhortations of Sruti such as the oft-quoted, "The weak never reach to the Atman" are of the same purport. Swamiji was the personification of our hoary culture. Writing about his life is the same as that of our country. Inspired utterances in his discourses should never be lost sight of, like those of other great personalities.

Chapter 8

The Nectarous Flow of Teachings

उपदेशमधुरसः

Our country Bharat has a long tradition of spiritual practice for the welfare here and hereafter as also for liberation from the cycle of samsara. The hoary tradition of ours suffered a temporary setback due to the wrong projections of it as unrighteous, and beset with ignorance and superstitions. The reason for the setback was the onslaught of foreign cultures. Swamiji, having studied in-depth the essentials of our cultural and religious heritage, modernized it based on the teachings of Paramahamsa Deva as culled from the latter's personal realizations. He took a resolution in his mind to spread his unique message across the continents, in the same manner as wind spreading fragrance, dense clouds causing rains, the sun giving out heat and light, and Hanuman Rama's message. He went to Chennai in the year 1892 as a first step in this endeavor of his, just like Mahendra hills were used by Maruti. Wherever Swamiji went, he impressed the elite in that place with his magnetic personality and brilliant intellect. Several friends, well-wishers, disciples, and others who loved our traditions, followed him with respect. Some of them informed Swamiji about the ensuing Parliament of Religions to be held in the USA. Swamiji, on hearing about the news, got the idea to participate in it, with a view to collect funds from abroad for the uplifting of the poor and miserable masses of our country thinking of them as forms of Bhagavan Narayana. He was awaiting command from the world teacher Sri Ramakrishna before proceeding with his plans, by way of a divine vision or some other signal of his grace. When he was in Chennai, he gave a number of discourses displaying his talent in harmonizing knowledge and work (karma jnana samanvaya) by making it clear by his analysis that the contradiction between them is due to the fruits thereof. He explained "The objective of (ceremonial) karma is heaven, while that of jnana is moksha". He clarified, "I have understood that realizing Advaita involves experiencing the truth about the eternal nature of Parabrahma as infinite, pure, inseparable and taintless. After experiencing non-duality, how can a wise, self-realized person revert to performing any kinds of unrighteous acts? Whatever such a person does can be accepted as standard for rightful conduct (dharma)."

One student studying in a college questioned the nature of God. Swamiji in an inspired mood asked him the counter question, "What is the nature of energy?" The student was struck dumb and could not say anything. Having received a tremendous welcome from the people of Chennai in every way, Swamiji left for Hyderabad on receiving an invitation from there. In Hyderabad, Swamiji gave an enchanting discourse, listening to which the Nizam, the ruler of the province, was highly impressed and he offered funds from his treasury for Swamiji's travel to the west. The people were highly inspired to hear from Swamiji that his message to the west will be on the lines of his discourse. Subsequently, the Maharaja of Khetri, having been blessed with a son on account of a boon given by Swamiji, joyfully

invited him again to his place. The Maharaj was the one who suggested the name Swami Vivekananda. With the encouragement of well-wishers from various quarters, preparations were afoot for Swamiji's travel abroad in the year 1893 CE. Having obtained the blessings of Ma Sarada and the darshan of his Guru Sri Ramakrishna, Swamiji started his journey on an auspicious day by the end of May. Enthusiastic citizens accompanied him up to the port. From there, Swamiji went aboard a ship at Mumbai on May 31, 1993.

On reaching Hong Kong, Swamiji went to see a Buddhist monastery. At that place, he was captured by the armed security staff. On coming to know that he was a Hindu yogi, they were very much pleased and humbly requested him to permit them to put protective shields on his body. Swamiji gave them a letter printed with the Pranava symbol Om. After that they showed him the monastery and its interiors as per his wish. Subsequently, he went to Japan. Observing the hard working nature of the Japanese people and the progress they made in the field of science, Swamiji felt very happy and expressed his appreciation of them. In one of his lectures in later years, Swamiji referring to his visit to Japan, said, "The people of Japan even now hold in high respect the spiritual wealth of our Indians. I told them that many of our countrymen are not very proficient in the education needed for decent livelihood but they are generous, devoted to righteous behavior and imbued with a spirit of renunciation."

Going to America

अमेरिकागमनम्

An eminent resident of Chennai sent a letter to a friend of his living in the USA introducing Swamiji, mentioning his extraordinary intellect and requesting him to extend his welcome to Swamiji. On reaching the USA, he travelled to Chicago. In Chicago, when he went to the venue of the World Parliament of Religions, he came to know that the parliament would be held in September and he would be accepted as a delegate only on production of a letter of introduction as a representative of a religious organization. Feeling that it was expensive to stay in Chicago until September, he decided to go to Boston on recollecting the invitation given to him by a lady, Kate Sanborn, to stay in her house near Boston as a guest. Accordingly he went to Boston and was received in her home. Coming to know about his intention to participate in the World Parliament of Religions, she introduced him to some distinguished persons. One of them was Professor Wright of Harvard University. On discussing with Swamiji about various topics, Prof. Wright was amazed at his proficiency. He suggested to him that he should participate in the Parliament of Religions. Swamiji mentioned that his intention in coming to the USA was participation in the Parliament and mentioned that he came to know about the need for credentials for that purpose. The professor then said, "Asking for credentials from you is like questioning the right of the Sun to shine." With this remark, he gave a letter of introduction to the president of the

Parliament extolling Swamiji's knowledge – "Here is a man who is more learned than all our learned professors put together."

From Boston, Swamiji went to Chicago but he lost the address of the venue of the parliament. He was at a loss to decide what to do when he was again invited as a guest in the house of a rich lady who herself took Swamiji to the venue of the parliament. Swamiji shed tears of gratitude for the extraordinary grace of God and Sri Ramakrishna. On producing the letter of Professor Wright, Swamiji was accepted as a delegate to the World Parliament of Religions. Mr. and Mrs. Hale, in whose house Swamiji stayed in Chicago, became lifelong friends of his.

Chapter 9

The Garland of Efforts 1

उद्यममालिका १

First Address in the Parliament of Religions

सर्वधर्मसभायां प्रथमं भाषणम्

Swami Vivekananda entered into the beautiful venue of the World Parliament of Religions in the city of Chicago. Innumerable speakers and members of the assembly, who were learned philosophers, assembled in the well decorated hall. Amidst the many traditional disciplined speakers on the beautiful platform, the handsome Swamiji shining in his light, adorned in his ochre clothes and with his gold hued turban, looked like the moon among the stars and planets in the sky. Listening to the profound, talented and spirited speeches, Swamiji was awestruck as it were, and went on delaying his talk many times when invited by the president of the assembly. Later when forced by the president, Swamiji got up from his seat and looked at the assembly as if it were the visible manifestation of Sri Ramakrishna's grace personified.

He commenced his speech with the wise and dignified words, "Sisters and brothers of America". Hearing this unique, pleasant and unheard of way of addressing, the audience felt joyful in their minds and spontaneously started loud clapping which continued without break for quite some time and touched the sky. Experiencing the presence of Goddess Saraswati, Swamiji expressed his gratitude to the audience and commenced his speech in a powerful resonant voice.

"I am standing in front of you here as a delegate to this convention representing a great country. The ancient religion Hinduism (Sanatana Dharma) of our country is the source of all religions. It is the religion of Maharshis (great sages) and is the essence of all Vedas and Vedanta. The supreme God whom the Indians worship is the benevolent goal of the devotees of various inclinations, just like the ocean is the ultimate destination of rivers following different paths. It is because of the attitude of tolerance and universal acceptance of Indians that the Jews banished from their homeland by the Romans, and the Zoroastrians too were given shelter in Bharat. I have come from that country to speak to the audience here about the forgiving attitude of my country. I wish to emphasize that the propagation of one's religion should never be done through violence, nor should hatred be shown towards persons of other faiths. It gives me immense pleasure to declare that the bell we heard today in the hall of this assembly will become an invitation to the auspicious farewell to all kinds of hatred and it will be the beginning of a new era of harmonious living together."

While Swamiji was proclaiming this kind of wonderful faith advocating harmony of religions, the following devotional hymn of surrender to his own Guru was ringing in his ears recollecting his inimitable greatness.

Taking Refuge in Sri Ramakrishna

श्रीरामकृष्णप्रपत्ति

I take refuge in that Paramahamsa who reasoned that the trivial education meant for livelihood alone is useless and thereby became totally God-oriented.

I take refuge in that Paramahamsa who showed respect by humble salutation to everyone and who treated his wife as his mother and Guru.

I take refuge in that Paramahamsa who worshipped his wife as the Divine Mother in order to teach mankind that all women need to be looked upon as forms of Divine Mother.

I take refuge in that Paramahamsa who gave the pleasant assurance that everyone can experience the presence of God which is essentially the same as the message of our scriptures, and made it lucid through examples from day-to-day life.

I take refuge in that Paramahamsa who told his disciples that they can see God and showed them several manifestations of divinity through his power-packed transmission of spirituality.

I take refuge in that Paramahamsa who was the supreme teacher that practiced other religions with the intent of proving to mankind that all religions lead to God.

I take refuge in that Paramahamsa who was a knower of Brahman and at the same time worshipper of Goddess Kali and who in spite of intensely suffering from throat cancer did not give up his constant teachings.

I take refuge in that Paramahamsa who with supreme courage and inimitable forbearance was determined not to use his spiritual power to get cured of his disease though capable of it, but bore the suffering with fortitude.

I take refuge in that Paramahamsa who got the injunction from Goddess Kali to remain in Bhavamukha for the welfare of humanity and did likewise.

Significance of Swamiji's Discourses

स्वामिप्रवचनवैशिष्ट्यम्

There were many speakers in the parliament who displayed erudition, but all of them confined their talks to propounding the supremacy of their own religion. The fruitfulness of all religions in realizing God, which was emphasized by Swamiji was very much appreciated by all the participants in the assembly. It was accepted by the president of the assembly and in all the reports and newspapers as also by his later disciple Nivedita that Swamiji's discourses were the best of all.

Swamiji's proficiency in various branches of knowledge, his supreme capability in presenting his ideas, his extraordinary memory and his ability to give extempore speeches were praised by scholars. The listeners were invariably attracted and spellbound by his words. Swamiji presented the essence of the religion of Bharat validating his ideas quoting extensively from scriptures. He said that the religion of India had no specific name but it could be defined as Sanatana Dharma based on the Vedas. During his lectures addressing the audience, Swamiji said, "Has any of you studied what is generally referred to as Hinduism? Those who did, please raise your hands." Seeing only two or three raising their hands, Swamiji said, "Without knowing the truth about our religion, you people cast aspersions on it, whereas our religion is actually the root of all other religions." With these words, he silenced all the great pundits. One of the members of the assembly (Annie Besant, theosophist) commented, "We should bend our heads in shame to think that we have been sending our preachers to the supreme country India to propagate our religion."

The Gist of Sanatana Dharma

सनातनधर्मसारः

Swamiji said during the course of a discourse, "Your preachers tell our people that human beings are sinners. Our religion emphasizes, 'We are all children of immortality. Our life is divine. The truth is that within all of us is an immortal Atma which is ever pure and is without beginning, middle or end. What we perceive as creation, preservation and destruction of the universe is an appearance of non-dual reality. Even so, our experiences of sorrow and other feelings are the result of our past actions.' This is the final declaration of our scriptures. First a person has to get rid of his ego if he is a spiritual aspirant aiming to reach perfection in liberation and be free from the fear of death. Death is merely a state reached at the time of giving up the body before reincarnating in a different body. The Atma has no disease, old age or death. There is no question of death for a person who has realized God. The ultimate goal of all religions is to get fulfillment through attaining God. The

religious teachers should orient their teachings towards harmony and never put obstacles in the path of Sanatana Dharma."

Importance of the Service of the Needy

दीनसेवाप्रामुख्यम्

Swamiji continued, "Christ taught to help others. Our Sanatana Dharma teaches that the Atma in all is one. We should serve the needy and the miserable with the conviction that we are serving ourselves. You do service and at the same time blame our religion. Your preachers hold in one hand their holy books and in the other a sword. Is this not the way your preachers propagate their religions in this world? Neither Mohammed nor Christ ever encouraged injuring others but they always spoke against causing injury. With ridicule and fault finding as also terrorizing with weapons of destruction, your preachers teach inane, fruitless and controversial sermons filled with hatred and fraud." In this powerful way, Swamiji passed scathing remarks on the preachers sent to India, in spite of opposition and obstacles in his path, with the strength and firmness of Mount Meru. Even though some fanatics were against him, many people were attracted by Swamiji's discourses. The presidents of the assemblies used to keep his speech in the end and to announce as such to the audience. In this way, they used to ensure that the audience would listen to the discourses of other speakers too and their assemblies turned out to be successes. Some women of African origin praised him saying, "You, a person of our race, became famous with the strength of your profound intellect and thereby made us proud."

Hearing about the victorious trumpet call of Vedanta and the appreciation Swamiji received abroad for his discourses, the devotees and admirers from Chennai organized a meeting in honor of Swamiji's success in the assembly. The king of Ramanathapuram, Sri Bhaskar Setupati and Khetri Maharaj, Ajit Singh expressed their happiness. They along with other devotees present in the assembly sent their congratulatory messages to Swamiji. Likewise, devotees from abroad sent their appreciation to the mother of Swamiji, Sri Bhuvaneswari Devi, congratulating her for the outstanding achievements of her son.

Manifestation of Powers

सिद्धीनामभिव्यक्तिः

Around this time, the superlative powers of yoga of the supremely great Swamiji began to manifest in various ways. Enchanting voice, compassionate face, the capacity to know the

thoughts in the minds of others and to relieve their sorrow by just a look, and several other extraordinary characteristics in the science of yoga became manifested in Swamiji.

Publication of Books

ग्रन्थमुद्रणम्

Swamiji's books on Raja Yoga, Jnana Yoga, Karma Yoga and Bhakti Yoga were published and became standard works in Vedantic literature. His lectures were taken down in shorthand by Goodwin and were subsequently published in his Complete Works. All his works have been universally accepted to be mature commentaries on the complex Vedantic ideas expressed in simple and easy to understand language. Some of the famous sayings of Swamiji are:

a) Meditation (dhyana) is an attempt to understand and fully realize one's real nature.

b) Jnana is the comprehension of the concepts of Sat and Asat (truth and falsehood) by one's own intellect.

c) Love of personal God with attributes is known as Bhakti.

d) Doing one's duty with love and faith in oneself in a detached spirit is known as Karma Yoga.

e) Yoga means fully controlling from all sides, the vagaries of the mind.

f) The spiritual aspirants can manifest their divinity in any one or more of the previously mentioned ways.

The terms like Atma, Prakriti, Moksha which are the names used in Vedantic works of commentary on scriptures like Bhagavad Gita by great teachers and Mahatmas like Sankaracharya became household names because of the repeated reference to them in appropriate contexts in Swamiji's speeches and his writings. Swamiji established various Societies, Maths and Missions abroad as well as in India for the benefit of spiritual aspirants, scholars and seekers after liberation. He started publication of the magazine Brahmavadin from Chennai. Some devotees from England saw Christ in Swamiji from whose lips issued forth again and again the holy name of Shiva and whose eyes were as it were anointed with the collyrium of love. Attracted by Swamiji's discourses, Madam Marie Louise, Leon Lamberg and Miss S.E.Waldo became his disciples and were given the names Kripa, Ananda and Haridasi respectively. On the suggestion of Swamiji, Swami Saradananda arrived in England to continue the work started by Swamiji. He was welcomed by the devotees there. While he was in England, Swamiji met German scholars Max Mueller and Deussen, who had

done extensive work on Vedic literature by way of prose translations and detailed commentaries. Swamiji called Bharat as the sacred land of sages with spiritual fulfilment. On his way back to India, he visited England a second time and was accompanied by some disciples from there. He stopped on his way back at Ceylon where he was accorded a grand welcome by the people of that country. His powerful speech in Ceylon which described in depth the essence of Vedanta expressed in elegant language was listened to with great enthusiasm by the people there. Bhaskara Setupati, the king of Ramanathapuram got a pillar constructed on 27th January 1897 as a victory symbol in memory of the return of Swami Vivekananda after establishing the glory of our heritage in the western land.

On his return to India, Swamiji said with a voice filled with love, "I have returned to my country Bharat and I am anxious never to leave my country, not even once." Swamiji was given a grand welcome in Chennai where he happily spent nine days. The purport of his speech in Chennai was as follows. "It is true that the supreme goal of human life is God-realization. But God is to be served in indigent and miserable persons. God, the ocean of mercy, will certainly be pleased with the service of the poor. Such service is our primary duty in this sacred land of Bharat, the dust of which is dearer to me than my own life." Swami Vivekananda's speech was praised by the famous newspaper 'The Hindu'. After that, on 15th February 1897, Swamiji reached Calcutta where he was given a tumultuous welcome. Swamiji was taken in a grand procession in the streets of Calcutta in a carriage with the youth pulling it instead of horses. Swamiji with his heart overflowing in joy met the elders and other citizens of Calcutta. Thereafter he went to Cossipore garden house and Alambazar. He felt happy to be back in the familiar surroundings. After that, a Meeting was organized to welcome and felicitate Swamiji. One foreign lady, after listening to Swamiji praising devotion to Krishna, was so much influenced that she became attached to meditation on Lord Krishna. Coming to know of this, Vaishnavas felt happy and respectfully visited the disciples of Swamiji.

When someone mentioned that he could not get peace of mind in spite of visiting the holy garden of Sri Ramakrishna's intense austerity and the temple of Kali Mata and further bathing in the holy Ganges in Dakshineswar, Swamiji answered with words of consolation that he would feel fulfilled and happy through serving society in an appropriate way. Swamiji silenced a person, who said that the wise should pray for Moksha (release from Maya) from Samsara, by his profound statement, "Desire for liberation is not different from any other desire. Renunciation and service are without doubt superior to it."

Chapter 10

The Garland of Efforts 2

उद्यममालिका २

Harmonizing the Three Great Scriptures of Sanatana Dharma

प्रस्थानत्रयसमन्वयः

"God is dearer to us than everyone else, because He resides always in our heart. In my view, we should all desire to realize God. The best way to attain God is by being always truthful. Man can attain perfection through any religion whether it is based on Vedas or not, if he has sincere yearning for God. Among all the ways of looking at God, the best way is to think of Him as a Mother. God is more loving than husband, friends, sons, etc. A self-realized person sees God in all beings and so serves in a detached spirit those who are in need, those who have no other support and those who are in dire difficulties, thinking of them as various forms of God."

The above Upanishad of Sri Ramakrishna became personified as Sarada Mata, whose very remembrance makes us think of the Motherhood of God. Sarada Mata has become verily the mother of all in the world. She is an embodiment of love and service. Swamiji projected the lives of his Master and Mother as embodying the harmony of the principles enunciated in the Srutis and Smritis. He got the full support of Sarada Mata in starting Maths and Missions against opposition from some of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, who thought that service to the society and such things were not according to Sri Ramakrishna's teachings. Swamiji following instructions of his Guru and the full support and blessings of Holy Mother Sarada Devi had woven a beautiful garland of flowers of Sri Ramakrishna's novel teachings into a series of activities of spiritual movement through Maths and Missions for the welfare of humanity. Today, the monks of the Ramakrishna Maths and Missions work with the dual purpose of attaining their own emancipation and serving the poor and needy in a spirit of detachment. Further, their activities include running of hospitals for boys and girls, giving discourses on our scriptures and publishing literature on our scriptures.

Mission of Service

सेवोद्यमः

Swamiji said, "I have no sympathy for those who while ignoring the dire suffering of people due to famine, plague, etc. strive with vain efforts of lesser importance like the nourishment

of cattle, birds, etc. The foremost primary duty of all of us is to work for the welfare and upbringing of suffering humanity." It was verily with this conviction in his mind that Swamiji established Missions and Maths for the uplifting of the distressed, poor and indigent, thinking of them as various forms of God. Swami Akhandananda, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, established a Sevashrama in Murshidabad which was mainly for the relief of the people afflicted with famine. Likewise, Ramakrishnananda, another disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, established Ramakrishna Math in Chennai.

Around this time (after 1897), Swamiji gave Sannyasa Deeksha according to scriptural injunctions to four Brahmacharis. He told them about the greatness of ascetic life in these words – "A monk should manifest spiritual awareness. He should strive for the welfare of humanity as well as for his own liberation. So you should be ready even to give up life in working for this." He appointed Swami Brahmananda as President and Swami Yogananda as Vice President of the Ashrama in Calcutta. In order to recoup from his sickness, Swamiji went to Almora, Kashmir and subsequently to Lahore. He met at Lahore, a professor of Mathematics, Ramatirtha who presented him with a golden watch with utmost affection. Swamiji expressed his happiness at receiving this gift but gave it back to Ramatirtha saying, "I shall keep my watch with you as a token of my remembrance." Ramatirtha felt happy on listening to Swamiji's discourses and was spellbound with the sweetness of his voice. Swamiji went from there to Alwar and then to Khetri where he was received with great respect by Khetri Maharaj who along with his assistants contributed plenty of money as donation for activities of Ramakrishna Maths and Missions.

Rules and Regulations

नियमावलिः

For activities related to welfare of the country as well as for giving spiritual discourses, Swamiji framed a set of rules to be followed as per Dharmic traditions (traditions of righteousness). Among other things, he wanted to find solutions to the problems prevalent in those times in society. He was of the opinion that if caste distinctions were removed, even to the extent of encouraging inter-caste marriages, the unity and solidarity of the society will be strengthened. He was convinced that the spread of broad-based education on a wide scale among all sections of society will remove ignorance among the general public and help in building enlightened citizenship. Swamiji's ideas included giving respect to the work of Brahmins and scholars who are engaged in bestowing Vedic knowledge and who thereby deserve worship by the general public. He also advocated support to the cause of spreading knowledge of Sanskrit in India by the scholars. He was of the opinion that mother tongue was to be used as the medium of instruction. He encouraged striving for a balanced and broad-based education that would have a synergistic effect by combining scientific

knowledge of the West with the spiritual inclinations of the East. Education along such lines would result in a strong society of analytical and discriminating individuals.

Swamiji's vision included the building of a new society consisting of persons who are dedicated to service, inclined to renunciation, having welfare and unity of humanity as their goal, and filled with helping nature and endowed with self-control. Swamiji got a statue of Sri Ramakrishna established in a temple constructed by Navagopal Ghosh in Calcutta. He composed the famous Sanskrit hymn,

"Om sthapakaaya cha dharmasya, sarva dharma-svarupine;

Avataara-varishthaaya Ramakrishnaaya te namah."

The meaning of the verse is – "Salutations to the supreme incarnation Ramakrishna who was the establisher of Dharma and is the embodiment of all religions." Now this hymn is sung daily in all the Ramakrishna Maths and Missions. In the year 1898, two women devotees named Ole Bull and Mueller gave a large amount of money for buying a piece of land in Belur village and for constructing buildings for the establishment of the Math.

Reforms

संस्कारकार्याणि

On the auspicious occasion of the birthday of the great teacher Sri Ramakrishna, Swamiji arranged the thread ceremony of the boys belonging to Vysya, Kshatriya and Brahmin castes by giving them the sacred thread. He made them chant Gayatri Mantra 108 times and he followed the other procedural aspects of the ceremony under the priesthood of his disciple Saratchandra Chakraborti, strictly adopting scriptural injunctions. Swamiji gave Sannyasa Deeksha to his disciple Swarupananda. He started publication of a magazine Prabuddha Bharata in English from Advaita Ashrama in Mayavati. The journal is regularly published even now. Swamiji gave Brahmacharya Deeksha to Nivedita and his other Western disciples following formal procedures. Brahmacharins and Brahmacharinis were given directions to be followed according to the conventions.

Coming to know about the prevalence of plague and the dire suffering of people caused by it, Swamiji's heart was filled with agony. He proposed that the site of Belur Math should be sold to raise funds for the rescue of those affected with plague, saying, "We can never ignore the calamity. We should actively get involved in relieving the suffering of people." Fortunately adequate funds were raised through donations and the situation was saved without the need for selling the Math premises.

Mohammadananda

महाम्मदानन्दः

In Almora, a Muslim became devoted to Swamiji and became his disciple. He was given the monastic title Mohammadananda.

Patriotism

देशभक्तिः

In Almora, Nainital and other places, Swamiji gave discourses on Shivaji Maharaj, Gautama Buddha, Sukadeva and other yogis. During the course of these discourses, he frequently recollected the affection shown by his Gurudeva towards him and how his teacher referred to him as Sukadeva. Further he mentioned how Sri Ramakrishna laid stress on virtuous character. From there Swamiji proceeded to Srinagar in Kashmir and gave inspiring speeches teaching love of our country. He went subsequently to Amarnath and was given there a boon by the lover of devotees Lord Shiva, granting Swamiji Swacchanda Maranam (death at his own will). Swamiji then praised Lord Shiva in the following words, "O Deva! You are verily the embodiment of compassion with the eight powers. Your body is smeared with holy ashes, adorned with skulls and snakes, with Vedic mantras, rituals and the four corners as your clothes. You are easily pleased with prayers. With half of your body given to your wife, You are surrounded by a group of Kapalikas, devotees and sages. All those who adopt different paths worship you alone. You have kept poison, having removed its poisonous effect in your throat, Ganga and Moon on the top of your head and Damaru, Trishula and yellow rosary of Rudraksha seeds in your hands. With all these in your possession, you adorn the golden mountain and perform your divine dance, displaying various moods (bhavas), giving immense pleasure with your dance of the universe." Swamiji visited Ksheer Bhavani temple and worshipped the Goddess with utmost devotion by doing Abhisheka with milk. He felt intensely sad on seeing the dilapidated condition of the temple. He then heard the voice of The Divine Mother consoling him with the words "Do not feel sad. I am capable of looking after my temple on my own."

Suffering from Curse

शापपीडा

After his visit to Ksheer Bhavani temple, Swamiji suffered intensely from stomach ache due to a curse given by a Muslim. Even though he recovered from this and became well after

praying to Sri Ramakrishna, he got a lingering doubt about Sri Ramakrishna's grace on him. He later (after returning to Calcutta) complained to Holy Mother Sarada Devi about Sri Ramakrishna's neglect of him. He was given consolation by her, who said, "How can you ever imagine that you are separated from your Guru who tied you with the strong bond of love?" Swamiji went to Lahore and then returned to the holy Ramakrishna Math which became an ornament of Belur village. While establishing the Math, Swamiji emphasized the need for disciplined behavior and accordingly framed a set of rules to be followed by the monks. These rules are followed even today and are mainly responsible for the elevated status of the Ramakrishna Order and the respect it commands from society.

Rules of the Math

मठनियमाः

The Ramakrishna Maths should be open to all irrespective of their creed. No attempt should be made to forcibly convert anyone from their religion. For each and every one, their individual faith is best for them. Before trying to teach others, a wise man concentrates on uplifting himself. It is important to encourage a spiritual aspirant to awaken his own inner strength. Monks should avoid mixing too intimately with the worldly persons. In particular they should keep distance from women to keep away any possible delusion. Obedience to senior monks and leaders is a precondition for developing a spirit of unity and fulfilment of the tasks by the junior monks. Renunciation, austerity and good behavior should be cultivated by those who join as Brahmacharins. Complete dedication to the regular service for the welfare of society is most important. These are a few of the guiding principles and rules propounded by Swamiji.

Swamiji called back two eminent dedicated monks, Swamis Prakashananda and Virajananda from Dhaka, for looking after the affairs of the Math in Belur. He told Swami Virajananda who was intensely pursuing his spiritual practice oriented towards liberation (Moksha), "If you want the empire of Brahman, give up the desire for your own liberation." He sent Swamis Turiyananda and Saradananda to Gujarat and Swami Sivananda to Sri Lanka. Later he requested Swami Turiyananda to accompany him on his second visit to the USA.

Chapter 11

The Garland of Efforts 3

उद्यममालिका ३

Second Visit Abroad

पुनर्विदेशपर्यटनोद्यमः

On 20th June 1899, Swamiji left for the USA. Swami Ramakrishnananda met him on the ship at Chennai. Swamiji went to Sri Lanka and from there to England. On the way he gave speeches which were recorded by Sister Nivedita and later published in book form. He then reached New York where the head of the Vedanta Society there, Swami Abhedananda, was doing excellent work. After that Swamiji went to California and other places where he gave lectures on a wide variety of topics like Buddhism, Islam and Christianity as also on Hindu religious books like Ramayana, Mahabharata, etc. He quoted extensively in his lectures from these religious books as well as from great English writers like Shakespeare and with references to sciences and arts. He also gave extensive lectures on Bhakti Yoga, Karma Yoga and Vedanta. His lectures were very profound and dealt in depth with various aspects of religions and related matters, at the same time mixing them with humor here and there in a lighter vein to make them interesting.

Swamiji established Vedanta Societies at various places in the USA. On 20th July 1900, he went to Paris in France where a World Parliament of Religions was organized. He had differences of opinion with the trend of the assembly which focused on historical angles instead of on the relative merits of different religions. He gave powerful speeches contesting the opinions expressed in the Parliament about some aspects of Hinduism. He proved with evidence from various sources the significance of Shaivism and the worship of Shiva Linga. He argued that Buddhism was an offshoot of Sanatana Dharma and Krishna's teachings in Bhagavad Gita predated Buddha's teachings which were in some respects echoes of the former. He said, "Whatever is proposed in Buddhism is also present in Sanatana Dharma which has in it the concept of Maya as well as the firm conviction of the truth of the universe. Further, according to Vedic Dharma, everyone has the right for realization of Truth whereas Buddhism insists on Sannyasa as a precondition for pursuit of Truth." Swamiji strongly opposed the theory proposed in the parliament that Indian culture owed its origin to Greek influence. He exhorted those who proposed a theory of Greek influence on Indian culture to revise their thinking and to show due respect to Indian culture. Around this time, Swamiji met the great scientist Jagadish Chandra Bose of brilliant intellect who propounded and proved indubitably his theory that plants too have life in them.

Homecoming

स्वदेशागमनम्

Upon completion of Western travel, Swamiji returned to Bharat without prior intimation. He returned incognito to Belur Math causing utmost surprise and happiness to many of the inmates of Belur Math. From there, Swamiji went to the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati in the Himalayas. He motivated Swami Virajananda who was ever inclined to meditation to engage himself in service activities too. However, Swamiji himself had a desire to have a center oriented solely towards nondual practice without any visual image. That was his intention in establishing Advaita Ashrama in Mayavati where the concentration would be on the formless aspect of God. He was, however, disappointed to see that subsequently Sri Ramakrishna's picture was being worshipped ceremonially even in Mayavati Ashrama.

Swamiji took his mother Bhuvaneswari Devi on a pilgrimage to holy places in Bengal and Assam. In the year 1901, Swamiji went to Shillong to see the great Englishman Cotton who did immense service for the welfare of Indians. He fell sick there and Cotton himself arranged for his treatment. Swamiji thereby regained his health fully. Subsequently, Swamiji went to the house of the late Nag Mahasaya, a great householder devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, in East Bengal. He obtained supreme peace in his house by receiving unprecedented hospitality from the wife of Nag Mahasaya. When Swamiji was in Dhaka in East Bengal, he got a severe attack of Asthma and had unbearable difficulty in breathing. He thought with complete detachment in his mind, "I am not worried whatever happens to my body, because the work I have done for the welfare of the world is adequate for 1500 years to come."

Subsequently, Swamiji returned to the Ramakrishna Math in the Belur village to spend the rest of his life in the company of his brother monks. In the South East corner of a building close to Ganga, a room was provided for Swamiji with three doors and four windows through which wind was flowing from all directions. In the room was kept a big picture of his Gurudeva Sri Ramakrishna, a mat made of deer skin for doing japa, some papers and a pen as also appropriate utensils and other items for doing worship. The supreme yogi Swami Vivekananda quietly spent his time giving lessons to his disciples, singing devotional songs, having fun in a lighter vein and in meditation. He used to call the animals and birds which were being taken care of in the Math by their pet names Mata, Hamsi, etc. Swamiji and Swami Brahmananda, like the inseparable pair Rama-Lakshmana, used to look after the growing of flower plants, creepers and green grass with a lot of care.

In 1901, Swamiji arranged the celebration of Durga Puja and Kali Puja in the holy presence of Sarada Mata. Food and clothes were distributed among the needy, and further sick persons were given treatment also. Swamiji did rolling circumambulation (angapradakshinam) in the Kali temple to fulfil his mother Bhuvaneswari Devi's wish.

Swamiji's health deteriorated gradually with passage of time and he suffered from pain in hands and feet, weakness and lack of sleep. He said to his disciple Sarat Chandra who was worried about Swamiji's health, "Do not worry about me. My body and mind are under the control of Kalika Devi. I have no concern about them."

One day, Swamiji got the almanac brought to him by Shuddhananda and selected one tithi. He indicated that date to Shuddhananda as the day of his departure from the world. He subsequently earmarked the place where his body was to be cremated. The compassionate Swamiji gave Swami Nirbhayananda his Gurudeva's ashes to cure him of fever, thereby relieving him of his fever and thus proving the power of his teacher Sri Ramakrishna. As another proof of Sri Ramakrishna's eternal presence, one day Swamiji prayed to his teacher with utmost devotion, "If you are near to me, please send the king of Gwalior to me." Accordingly, very soon, a messenger came with news about the arrival of the king. Swamiji went to Varanasi and Bodhgaya along with a Japanese person who came to him with a request to participate in a World Parliament of Religions to be conducted in Japan. After returning from Bodhgaya, he happily witnessed the birthday celebration of Sri Ramakrishna. Even though he was not in a fit condition even to get up from bed due to his sickness, Swamiji enjoyed talking in person to devotees. Swamiji fasted on Ekadasi and the next day he served a meal to his disciple Sister Nivedita, and himself washed her hands saying that Jesus himself washed the feet of his disciple. This is an indication of his impending departure from the world. (On the day of Last Supper, Jesus Christ washed the feet of his disciples). This happened two days before Swamiji left his body.

On the last day, Swamiji taught scriptures to his disciples. In the evening, Swamiji went on foot along with Swami Premananda to the Belur village and looked around the place displaying enthusiasm and immense curiosity. The two of them wandered around for quite some time. After a long walk, they returned late in the evening. Then Swamiji sat for doing Japa with his Japamala. After sometime, he lay down on his bed and his life left through Brahmarandhra in that posture befitting the departure of a supreme Yogi and one who attained perfection in meditation. At the same time in Chennai, Swami Ramakrishnananda heard Swamiji telling him, "I have spat out my body." All the residents of the Ashrama were terrified, sad and felt helpless. They lamented, "Swamiji left us today making us helpless like orphans." Some among the Ashramites, however, thought that Swamiji was in Nirvikalpa Samadhi. But a doctor announced after the due examination that Swamiji was no more.

Swamiji's footprints were taken in red paint for the purpose of keeping them in the temple along with his clean clothes for daily worship. Swamiji's body was covered with saffron clothes and flowers, and was subsequently cremated by the disciples. A temple now exists where his ashes were kept and there is a marble statue of his in the temple.

Swami Vivekananda was handsome in appearance and had a magnetic personality. He was the greatest among patriots and an establisher of Dharma. Even Bhagavan Adisesha cannot describe the great work done by Swamiji for the welfare of humanity. Swamiji said

clearly in one of his talks, "If there were another Vivekananda, he only can understand what this Vivekananda did. I have received an unprecedented honor in several countries. Every bit of my work is entirely due to the grace of my Gurudeva which continues to flow on me without wearing out in the least." Swamiji was unique in every way. His glorious life is unforgettable and sacred with inimitable qualities. Swamiji's wide knowledge, fortitude, liberality, patience, strength of body and mind, compassion, detachment, depth of understanding and love of humor are unparalleled. He was engaged in incessant work while being a Jivanmukta.

We can say here that in Sri Ramakrishna's philosophy which is all inclusive like the Pranav Akshara 'AUM', Sri Ramakrishna's life itself is described by A, Sri Sarada Devi's life is like U and Swami Vivekananda constitutes M. Motivated by a deep yearning resulting in his asking the question, "Have you seen God?" to Devendranath Tagore and other well-known teachers, the young Narendra was led to Sri Ramakrishna who moulded him into the lord of yogis, Swami Vivekananda. Our salutations to the supreme yogi Swami Vivekananda who hated cowardice, who loved service to society above everything else, whose goal was to uplift the poor and miserable, and who restored the sacred traditions and culture of Bharat to its past glory. O great Swamiji, your great teacher, the resplendent soul and the veritable embodiment of Lord Shiva, was inspired to uncover and display his supreme power after seeing you. He made you a lord of sages who fully dispelled the darkness enveloping the world and caused the light of transcendental knowledge to spread across the world, making it a veritable abode of joy.

Thus ends the book on Swami Vivekananda by Vemuri Anjaneya Sarma, the poet, written due to the inspiration from the graceful look of Paramahamsa Deva.